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A PROPOSED SURVEY ON THE CONDITIONS GOVERNING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN NORTH CAROLINA

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AT THE LAST meeting of the North Carolina Council of English Teachers one of the speakers brought out some surprising facts in connection with the work of the English teacher in the average high school in North Carolina. The average teacher is a sort of maid of all work among her associates. She, or he, may be called upon to coach the debate team, to be dramatic critic editor's assistant on the high school paper, or chairman of the publicity committee for the community and the high school. At the same time she may teach Latin or French or mathematics or agriculture or any other of a dozen subjects. In fact, she probably is only teaching English to fill in her hours and because nobody else wants to. Anybody can teach English, thinks the average principal.

Such conditions as these demand attention, and the Council thought that a survey of the whole situation would be the best means of bringing about this result. The survey offers an excellent means of measuring conditions and incidentally paving the way for improvements. They are becoming a favorite device in the educational world; and an English Survey, while somewhat new in the South, is not at all rare in some other sections.

New Jersey has made two surveys of her English teacher situation, and finds that by means of it conditions have been appreciably changed for the better. The survey has been under the leadership of the State English Teachers Association. A few extracts from their 1919 report will serve to show both the questions in which they were interested and the results they obtained.

A summary which begins the report begs the reader and critic to remember, (1) *that English is a comparatively new study, and unsettled in aims, etc.*; (2) *that too many things are expected of the English teacher*; (3) *that the teaching of English requires more skill and personal effort than the teaching of any other subject*; (4) *that the public often demands a higher standard of English from pupils than it uses*; and (5) *that the results are as good as can be expected under the present conditions.*

The questions answered in the body of the report are both full and exhaustive. They discuss such matters as the length of periods, the number of pupils, the number of periods taught, and the amount of time devoted to various branches of work, such as theme

reading, composition, literature, etc. They deal with questions concerning methods, projects, time-saving devices, and conferences, and apply these to all phases of the work. They embrace questions of personal interest to the teacher, such as experience, preparation, salary, hours spent at vocation, amount of recreation and such kindred topics. The answers are both instructive and thought-provoking.

In their recommendations, the New Jersey Association makes such significant statements as these: No teacher of English should teach more than 20 periods per week, have more than 25 pupils per class nor more than 80 pupils altogether. Five periods of English should be demanded throughout the high school course of four years. Every teacher should have at least two hours of recreation a day. No more than 7 hours per week should be devoted to theme reading.

How does the average North Carolina High School English teacher's work compare with these recommendations, taken as standards? That is what the English Council wishes to know, and for this purpose a committee was appointed to carry out such a survey in our own state. In purpose and scope, our survey will be much like New Jersey's. It can only hope to get before the profession as a whole the importance of the English teacher's task, and the enormous handicap under which the average teacher works.

At the summer school sessions last summer some preliminary steps were taken and a mimeographed questionnaire was filled out in order to give the committee an idea of the response it might expect from the state at large. The results were meager, because of several circumstances; but the main idea, which was to give publicity to the survey was presented to the teachers of the state at two different institutions.

Some of the results, although offered in no way as proof of conditions as they exist in the state at large, are nevertheless, matters of interest, and are given below.

Perhaps the most significant fact brought out by this preliminary questionnaire was that few of the teachers who filled it out were full-time English teachers. Less than 28% taught English alone, against 72% who spent only a part, sometimes less than half, of their time on English. As was to be expected, practically all taught more than the New Jersey standard of 20 periods per week, some even running as high

as 35, and many up to thirty. The periods averaged 45 minutes, but some were as short as 30 and others as long as 60.

The majority of the courses were of the combination sort, offering literature and composition, both oral and written in a kind of unified course throughout the term. The average time spent in reading themes was therefore rather low, just over an hour per day, although the New Jersey standard puts it at seven hours per week.

The cry of many was "not enough time," and in support of it they offered an average number of three extra-curriculum activities which took from one to four (and these estimates are sure to be low) hours per week. 90% of those filling out the questionnaires reported extra-curriculum activities, ranging through such diverse subjects as reporting and community betterment, or coaching basketball.

The great majority favor a large and more active English Teachers' Association, embracing a membership of all English teachers, with publications and a membership fee. This would indicate that such a feeling is common among English teachers, and if it is general, will be a great force for improvement in the future.

Scarcely 10% of the group reported efforts at personal conferences, although this is recognized as one of the most important considerations in the teaching of English. Few had made use of projects, and although the majority mentioned efforts at correlation, none stated definitely the results they had obtained.

Space will not permit a tabulation of replies to all the questions, but enough have been given to show some necessity for a survey in North Carolina, and to hint at the conditions which exist among English teachers.

It is evident that a survey such as the English Council is contemplating cannot be made unless every English teacher in the state is made fully aware of its importance, and unless every English teacher takes an interest and feels an individual responsibility in the project. The questionnaire will be mailed to English teachers all over the state sometime during December, and should be returned to the committee headquarters at Chapel Hill within a period of two weeks. Each teacher is asked to fill it out as completely and carefully as possible, and to bear in mind that the Council is interested in conditions as they are, with an eye to suggestions for improvement. Much good can be done for the overburdened English teacher, if an exact statement of the conditions together with a statement

of the ideal conditions is placed in the hands of every high school principal and county superintendent in the state.

The material and answers given in the questionnaires will be treated in strict secrecy by the committee, and nothing will be published which might in any way do harm to the individual teacher. As a rule, the individual teacher's answers to the questions will not receive separate treatment in the report. In some rare instances, it may be necessary to mention an individual answer, where it is distinctive. In any case, the teacher's name will not appear. Therefore no teacher need fear to answer the questionnaire fully and frankly.

The committee is anxious to have suggestions as to questions which should be included in the questionnaire, methods of securing prompt and careful answers, and any other matters which suggest themselves.

Letters may be addressed to Prof. C. A. Hibbard, Chapel Hill, President of the State Council, or to Mr. A. C. Howell, Chairman of the Committee.

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lege. He later spent two years in graduate work at Johns Hopkins University. He returned to his *alma mater* in 1889 as Professor of Chemistry, which position he held until 1915. From 1912 to 1915, Dr. Brewer was Dean of Wake Forest College. In the summer of 1915 he was chosen President of Meredith College, Raleigh, which position he now holds. Since Dr. Brewer became President of Meredith he has so strengthened and developed the institution that today it stands in the fore-rank of higher institutions for women in the Southern states.

Mr. Warren was born in Durham County in 1887 and received his early training in the rural schools of his native county and in the city schools of Durham. He graduated from Trinity College in 1908 and taught history and science in Gastonia, N. C., where he was principal of the Gastonia High School. After leaving school work Mr. Warren took up newspaper work in Durham. Later he went to Raleigh where he served as correspondent for many state papers. During his newspaper career Mr. Warren has "covered" four history making sessions of the legislature at which sessions the major portion of our present school legislation was enacted. He was chosen secretary of the Teachers Assembly last August and has been busily engaged since that time with the duties of his office.